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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001005

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT AIRWAYS PREPARES FOR WAR

REF: A. KUWAIT 00806

B. STATE 71829

¶11. SUMMARY. In the face of a potential US-led attack on Iraq and any retaliatory strikes, Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) unveiled its emergency plan, which includes reduced flights and the possibility of relocating operations to Dubai. Officials at Kuwait International Airport will continue to maintain operations unless military action jeopardizes the safety of civilian flights (ref A), but KAC and other carriers have developed contingency plans that involve transporting passengers overland to airports in neighboring countries. Additional safety measures are being taken at Kuwait's airport ahead of any crisis. END SUMMARY.

KAC EMERGENCY PLAN

¶12. Fawaz Al-Farah, Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety and Air Transport at Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), told EconOff March 16, 2003, that KAC submitted an emergency plan in the event that Kuwait International Airport is forced to halt civilian operations. Al-Farah reiterated that the airport plans to remain open as long as possible, closing only if allied attacks from Kuwait, Iraqi counterattacks, or terrorist activity make it too dangerous to continue civilian flights.

¶13. KAC conferred and coordinated with DGCA and Kuwait's Civil Defense Department to design its emergency plan. The plan's main component involves KAC relocating its base of operations to Dubai, in nearby United Arab Emirates, until it is safe to resume flights from Kuwait. In this arrangement, KAC would limit its departures to four or five destinations, including Bombay, Cairo, Jeddah, and London. Passengers traveling to other places, such as the United States or Western Europe, would need to make connecting flights.

¶14. On March 14, KAC Board Chairman Ahmad Al-Zaben told Kuwaiti news agency KUNA that KAC plans to continue operating most of its flights. With the possible onset of hostilities, however, KAC is among those airlines in the Middle East that has started curtailing some of its commercial flights (ref B). These routes include two direct flights to Chicago, three to London, and four each to Frankfurt, New York, Paris, and Rome, in addition to other flights outside Europe and the United States.

¶15. Al-Zaben said that KAC has devised plans to address critical conditions and secure safety of passengers during flights, as well as helping them transit by land to Dubai or an alternate location near Kuwait, if necessary. Al-Farah said that DGCA has requested from KAC details on specific arrangements for transporting passengers overland, as well as any special visa arrangements. He was told that KAC was finalizing its plans and would reveal them soon.

¶16. While KAC has the largest staff and operates the most flights out of Kuwait, it is not alone. Other carriers, such as British Airways, KLM, and Lufthansa, continue to operate at mostly full or slightly reduced schedules (ref A). Al-Farah said each individual carrier must decide whether to continue flights from Kuwait and will be responsible for ensuring its passengers reach alternate destination sites.

¶17. Al-Zaben said KAC may be forced to slightly raise airline fares due to increased insurance and fuel costs, but would keep ticket hikes within the minimum range and not try to gouge anxious passengers. In an effort to offset any increases, KAC Director General Shaykh Talal Mubarak Al-Sabah told the press March 14 that "KAC has decided to cut operation costs to meet the demands of lower income groups" who might want to leave Kuwait in the time of emergency. DGCA's Al-Farah said his office has not yet received requests from any of the air carriers to increase ticket prices.

AIRPORT OPERATIONS

¶18. Al-Farah said overall operations of Kuwait's airport will depend on a given situation. He admitted it was possible that all civilian operations would cease in a time of crisis and only military flights would originate from Kuwait. He added that KAC and other carriers have plans to scatter or

remove their aircraft from the runway should word come of an imminent missile attack from Iraq. If the airport closes, KAC will immediately vacate its jets to Dubai, Al-Farah said.

¶9. In the event of an attack, the airport has provisions to shelter its personnel and any passengers on the premises. An extensive basement under the airport grounds has been prepared and equipped with food, water, and first aid kits. Gas masks are available for all staff members but not yet for the general public. Al-Farah said a massive review of the airport's fire fighting system was conducted last year, following a large-scale fire at the airport in August. Airport staff have been put through several training sessions and provided detailed instructions in case of emergency.

COMMENT

¶10. Post plans to keep in regular contact with DGCA and has asked Al-Farah to alert us of any new developments in the operations of Kuwait Airways Corporation or Kuwait International Airport.

JONES